



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia WA 98501

January 13, 2014

Dear Mr. Bob Zeigler,

We are writing to provide comments on the Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS) 13-082: Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area Seasonal Road Closure. We have a strong history of conservation on this landscape, and have supported the existing winter closure since 2008. While we continue to support the winter closure, we disagree with your proposal to open a through road bi-secting the closure area.

The lands covered by this closure were purchased with a purpose to “provide big game winter range and upland bird habitat, and also to provide diverse wildlife related recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing.” The management goals as stated in policy for this area “are to preserve habitat and species diversity for both fish and wildlife resources, maintain healthy populations of game and non-game species, protect and restore native plant communities, and provide diverse opportunities for the public to encounter, utilize, and appreciate the wildlife and wild areas.”

With over 640 miles of groomed snowmobile trails in Kittitas County, it is clear that there are a multitude of opportunities for this activity. While the need for additional off-road vehicle access is limited, the value and need for wintering habitat that helps stressed species survive is great, and must be prioritized.

Absolutely no information was presented in the DNS documentation, SEPA checklist, or associated analyses tied to the Naneum Ridge to Columbia River Recreation Planning Process that shows this area can meet these objectives and sustain higher levels of human disturbance in winter. This decision is also circumventing the public discussion around this collaborative planning process on how to manage access in balance with natural resources into the future.

Your own letter presenting this proposal displays the effectiveness of the widely supported existing closure by stating, “With implementation of the seasonal motorized vehicle restriction, hunting restrictions and other management actions, private land damage complaints have decreased, total herd size has increased, the herd size in the southern portion of the winter range has increased, and antlerless harvest opportunities have been partially restored. Not all of these positive trends can be attributed to the restriction of motor vehicles, but it has been one of several related management actions.”

We support the ability of the public to enjoy recreational opportunities to experience the wild places and wildlife in our state, but fail to see how opening a motorized through route in a key winter closure area protecting a statewide priority elk herd achieves this. Please withdraw the proposal to open the through road, and maintain the winter closure as it has stood since 2008.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Mark Lawler
National Forest Committee Chair
Sierra Club – Washington State Chapter